



NEWS RELEASE

DROUGHT COORDINATION COMMITTEE

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

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COG Encourages Wise Water Use and Promotes Drought Awareness *Water Supplies Remain Adequate as Dry Weather Conditions Persist*

Washington, D.C. -- As temperatures soar and dry conditions are forecasted to persist through August, area residents and businesses are being advised of the importance of water conservation efforts, especially outside the home, to help alleviate unnecessary demands on the region's water systems, the Drought Coordination Committee (DCC) at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) announced today.

Regional officials emphasized that there is an adequate supply of water in the Potomac River and reservoirs to meet both current and future needs. However, practicing wise water use in and around the home is key to ensuring the stewardship of the region's water resources. Current forecasts indicate that the unusual period of dry weather that the metropolitan Washington region has experienced since the spring is likely to continue.

"At this time, we want to encourage the public to continue good water conservation habits," said Anthony H. Griffin, Fairfax County Executive and Chairman of COG's Drought Coordination Committee. Griffin noted that eliminating unnecessary outdoor water use can save thousands of gallons of water annually, and encouraged the public to look at COG's new Landscaping and Watering Guide and to delay new landscaping projects when possible. "Contrary to popular belief, watering early in the morning and no more than 1 inch per week can keep lawns thriving," he said. Griffin also noted that "repairing leaking toilets and faucets, installing low-flow shower heads, teaching children to turn off the water while they brush their teeth, and only running full loads in dishwashers and clothes washers are all good ways to use water wisely."

Because fire safety is also of particular concern at this time, committee members encourage residents to use extra caution when smoking outside, handling outdoor grills or engaging in other activities that involve flammable materials.

The committee -- which has operated a four-stage, regional drought response plan since 2000 -- emphasized the region's current drought conditions are still within the "normal" stage, when water supply is adequate to meet all demands. Although several smaller jurisdictions have implemented voluntary conservation measures (the towns of Round Hill, and Middleburg, Virginia; Loudoun County Sanitation Authority; Mt. Airy, and the City of Frederick, Maryland) or mandatory water restrictions (the town of Purcellville, Virginia), at this time officials note that in the region, conditions remain within the normal range.

Officials will continue to monitor conditions closely and, should conditions worsen, would consider implementation of the next stage of the regional water supply and drought plan, the "watch." It is highly unlikely that the two highest levels in the plan, the "warning" or "emergency" would be reached this year.

The response plan is currently designed for 95 percent of the region's communities where customers use the Potomac River system for their drinking water supply. The system includes water obtained from the Potomac River, the Occoquan Reservoir, and the Patuxent River reservoirs, and is supplemented during extreme low flow by the Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca reservoirs.

Officials stressed that they are monitoring drought conditions closely, and that the Potomac River special storage reservoirs constructed in the 1980s to provide water during summertime droughts are full and unlikely to be needed.

"Thanks to foresight and planning by area water utilities and local governments, the metropolitan Washington region is far better prepared to withstand a severe drought than many other regions," Joseph Hoffman, Executive Director of the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin, said. "Water storage in the Jennings Randolph and Little Seneca Reservoirs, combined with the natural flow of the Potomac River, is adequate to meet the needs of the region. Together, these two reservoirs contain more than 17 billion gallons of water that can be released into the Potomac River if needed." The back-up reservoirs were used to supplement river flows in 1999 and 2002.

Regional officials cautioned that those who use groundwater or other smaller water supply systems (approximately 5 percent of the population) may be more vulnerable and should take steps to conserve water.

The dry conditions being experienced in the Potomac River Basin are part of a much larger drought affecting the mid-Atlantic region. Precipitation in metropolitan Washington is more than 2.67 inches below normal since October 2006, and river flows are well below normal levels. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center has declared 66 percent of the Potomac River basin at a moderate (D-1) to severe (D-2) drought level.

About the Potomac River System

Water obtained from the Potomac River system is supplied by the region's three major public water utilities: Fairfax Water, the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission and the Washington Aqueduct Division of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In addition to the major utilities, it also includes customers of the District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority, the Loudoun County Sanitation Authority, the Prince William County Service Authority, the Virginia American Water Company for Alexandria and Dale City, and Vienna, Herndon, the City of Falls Church, Arlington County and the City of Fairfax. The City of Rockville, the Town of Brunswick, Frederick County, and the Town of Leesburg also obtain their water from the Potomac River.

About the Drought Coordination Committee

Members of the Drought Coordination Committee include Chief Administrative Officers from COG's 21 member governments, the General Managers of area water utilities, water supply officials from the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin. The DCC is supported by staff from COG and the

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center and the US Geological Survey. It was established in June, 2000 by the COG Board of Directors in response to the severe drought during the summer of 1999. The committee works to insure a coordinated and scientifically sound response to protecting the region's water supply resources, and to encourage permanent behavioral change through adoption of wise water use measures.

To view more information on COG's Regional Water Supply and Drought Response Plan, Wise Water Use campaign, current drought conditions in individual jurisdictions, and the new Landscaping and Watering Guide, visit mwcog.org.

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